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focus on Foster Care

A briefing from Casey Family Programs

1 **Child Welfare Issues**

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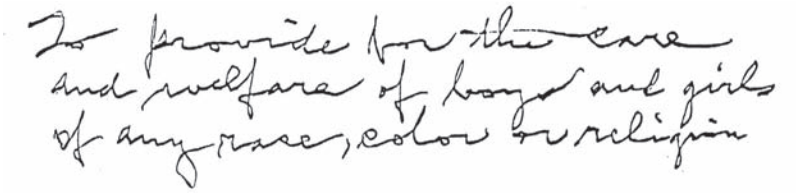
Committing to Diversity and Anti-Racism

The evolution of a national operating foundation's vision to serve children of all races



—Jim Casey's handwritten notes describe the work of the national operating foundation he founded in 1966.

Across the foundation, Casey Family Programs' policies and practices add up to a firm commitment to diversity and anti-racism:

- Recruiting qualified staff from communities of color
- Applying racial and ethnic identity practices in daily clinical work
- Ongoing training in anti-racism and cultural competence
- Contracting with businesses owned by women and persons of color
- Addressing racial issues through creating the Casey Alliance for Racial Equity (CARE)—Casey Family Programs, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Services, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Marguerite Casey Foundation

Today 61 percent of all children in the foster care system are children of color, although children of color represent only 39 percent of children in the general population in the United States. Data show that race does not increase the probability that a parent will abuse or neglect a child, and yet a child of color is statistically much more likely than a white child to be removed from the home.*

These and other statistics indicate that the child welfare system is not yet free of institutional racism.

When Jim Casey, founder of United Parcel Service, started Casey Family Programs, he sought to serve children of all races, and his mandate guided the foundation's start in 1966. Since then, Casey Family Programs' commitment to anti-racism and diversity has grown to encompass its hiring and business practices, its services to youth, its tools and resources for caseworkers, and its state, tribal, and federal advocacy efforts.

Asking hard questions

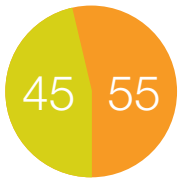
1966–1975

At the end of Casey Family Programs' first 10 years, its board of trustees asked the organization a hard question: Was the foundation really helping the youth and families it served? An advisory committee was formed to answer that question. This committee included Seattle civil rights activist and education advocate Charles Huey and social worker Joan Poliak.

The committee learned that, like other child welfare agencies, Casey Family Programs was not adequately addressing the needs of children of color.

*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2005). *The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2003 estimates as of August 2005*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Population Reference Bureau. (Analysis of data from U.S. Census Bureau; Prevent Child Abuse America, 2001.)

"Persons of color represent 45 percent of Casey Family Programs' current workforce."



In September 2005, Casey president and CEO Ruth Massinga challenged participants at the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Policy Conference to lead the national debate concerning race, class, poverty, and privilege in this country.

In 1975, the ethnic composition of the population Casey served mirrored that of the general population—10 percent of the youth in Casey's care were children of color. But few of these youth were placed in foster families of color, and Casey's staff was uniformly white. Youth of color in Casey's care had few role models who could help them understand their own identity, their cultural heritage, or how to navigate the racism they would encounter in their lives.

Casey offered the same services to all youth, but it failed to recognize the cultural and social differences that created unequal needs and unequal supports. By acknowledging this issue, Casey became a leader among child welfare organizations—and began the work that would occupy Casey leaders and staff for the next 30 years.

Learning culture

1976–1988

Following the recommendations of the board's advisory committee, Casey Family Programs hired Linda Wilson, the first staff person to build Casey's capacity for addressing cultural differences and diversity in caseloads.

Wilson first focused on building relationships in the Seattle area. Caseworkers from Casey's Seattle office spent a week in a public child welfare office staffed by and serving persons of color.

Wilson consistently brought Casey staff the message that learning culture meant you had to start talking openly about race and ethnicity. "Many of the histories in this country are very painful, and many people of color have had painful personal experiences around these issues," she says. "It's common to try to be polite and back off from fully talking about racism and bias. But the most important thing is being able to talk through these issues."

Casey's deepening understanding of communities of color led the organization to place increased emphasis on finding culturally appropriate caregivers within a youth's extended family. Fostering based in kinship care connected youth to their racial and ethnic identities, and it also acknowledged an important strategy for providing care that already existed in many communities of color, independent of the state's child welfare system.

While directly improving services to youth and families, Casey Family Programs also began aligning its hiring practices with an increasing commitment to diversity at all levels, from the leadership to the front lines of its foster care services. Charles Huey was elected to the board of trustees in 1978—Casey's first African American trustee. Joan Poliak joined the board four years later. Their voices continued to advocate for cultural competence in all of Casey's work.

When Casey began working with American Indian tribes in the mid-1980s, few American Indian social workers held Masters of Social Work (MSW) degrees. In response, Casey sponsored its own American Indian and Hawaiian Native caseworkers to complete their MSWs at select universities. The graduates returned to Casey in offices serving Native youth and families.

Through this effort Casey became a better partner with tribal systems, while at the same time providing more support for Native youth served

outside of the tribal child-welfare system.

Confronting racism

1989–2005

From her start as a caseworker in Harlem, Ruth Massinga has built a career as a national leader in improving the lives of our nation's most vulnerable families. Massinga came to Casey Family Programs as its executive leader in 1989. Under her leadership, the foundation articulated diversity and anti-racism as a core value, raising it to the level of an organizational commitment that informed all of Casey's work—not just specific programs and initiatives.

Each Casey office and department designated one employee to coordinate team conversations and events about diversity and anti-racism. As the work developed, diversity and anti-racism moved from an optional to a required area of development for all Casey employees in their annual performance goals.

To support these new measures, Massinga created a specialized, cross-functional diversity team in 2000.

Casey leadership accepted the diversity team's recommendation to require *Undoing Racism*™ training for all Casey staff. Provided by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, *Undoing Racism* examines the history of racism and the continued presence of bias, institutional racism, and white privilege in our communities and the workplace.

The *Undoing Racism* workshop—which remains a required training for all employees—provides a facilitated forum for the kinds of courageous conversations Linda Wilson's work introduced in the seventies and eighties.

"The dominant culture in this country has the luxury of not talking about 'white privilege,' or the unearned privileges that come simply because one's skin is white," says Ralph Bayard, senior director of diversity. "It's a hard message to hear. And for people of color, the conversation brings up a lot of internalized negative, hurtful experiences. But if we're going to improve the lives of youth and families, we need to have these conversations."

In order to help improve the lives of all children in the foster care system, Casey is releasing *Knowing Who You Are* in 2006. It's a three-part program that consists of a video, e-learning course, and in-person training—developed in collaboration with youth in care, foster families, and social workers. The program helps caseworkers and administrators understand their own cultural perspectives and provides guidelines for helping youth cultivate and embrace their racial and ethnic identities.

"Youth in care often have only the culture of foster care to help them understand who they are," says Chiemi Davis, managing director and 11-year Casey veteran. "The 'foster care' identity can be limiting and stigmatizing. We remove youth from their families and expect them to manage trauma and difference, often without drawing on the resources of a positive cultural heritage. We want to give youth the opportunity to connect with their cultural traditions, especially when they have no contact with their birth families. We want them to find ways to challenge society's racism and discrimination."

We at Casey value diversity and anti-racism. We honor differences and courageously confront racism and discrimination.

—A core value of Casey Family Programs

OUR MISSION

Casey Family Programs provides and improves—and ultimately prevents the need for—foster care.

To learn more about this and other issues and promising practices in child welfare, please visit our Web site at **www.casey.org**

Casey Family Programs
1300 Dexter Avenue North, Floor 3
Seattle, WA 98109

256.1-3010-05

Taking bold action against racism

Looking forward from 2005

In the last 40 years, more has changed in foster care than Casey Family Programs' values and approaches. The child welfare system has experienced not only an overall increase in the number of children entering foster care, but also a disproportionately steep increase in the number of children of color entering the system, especially African American children.

At every point in the child welfare system, children and families of color are represented in numbers that far exceed their relative proportion of the population.

Where does disproportionality come from? That's a question that Casey continues to raise as a key issue in child welfare.

In the Seattle area, Casey is an active partner in the Seattle-based King County Disproportionality Task Force, analyzing regional data on decision points in the child welfare system—such as whether to remove children from their birth parents. Problematic decision points are simple enough to find. Determining how to change what is happening at these points is more difficult.

"The task force doesn't know, with precision, whether decisions that disadvantage black and brown children are made on the basis of ignorance, or to preserve the status quo of existing systems, or to help individual children without seeing the larger picture," says Massinga. "The question of intentionality is not always clear."

At a national level, Casey has convened the Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Disproportionality with public agency partners in 13 state and county jurisdictions, including Alaska, Arizona, Texas, Washington, and California.

A two-year commitment that began in 2005, the collaborative conducts small, rapid tests of change to reduce disproportionality and disparities in well-being for children and families of color in the child welfare system. This work requires bold action to confront institutional racism and innovative leadership to make a lasting difference.

"It has taken us many years to get here," says Massinga. "I'm not going to predict how long it will take us to unravel the problem of disproportionality. But the key thing is to be *determined* to unravel it. We will continue to improve the work we're doing every day with young people of color in foster care, and we will continue the work to get rid of the inherent racism that drives the way this system works."

What will it take? "The conversations must continue," she says. "The work must keep moving and be visible for us to have a realistic shot at solving the problems of racism."

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